Georgia's largest health system will fire workers who refuse the flu shot, including remote workers and contractors

10/06/2026 // Cassie B. // **1.8K** Views

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- Emory Healthcare will fire employees who skip its flu vaccine requirement by mid-November.
- Workers must get the shot or an approved medical or religious exemption by Nov. 1 or face unpaid suspension.
- A Cleveland Clinic preprint found vaccinated employees had a 27% higher flu risk in 2024-2025.
- CDC estimates show flu vaccine effectiveness has ranged from 19% to 60% since 2009-10.
- Many healthcare workers are skipping flu shots as Moderna's new mRNA vaccine arrives.

Georgia's largest healthcare system is threatening to terminate employees who decline the influenza vaccine, raising questions about workplace mandates and vaccine effectiveness. Emory Healthcare requires all workers—including contractors and remote staff—to receive a flu shot or secure an approved medical or religious exemption by 11:59 p.m. Nov. 1. Those who miss that deadline face unpaid suspension and cannot use paid time off during the suspension period. Employees who fail to submit proof of vaccination or an exemption form by 4 p.m. Nov. 15 will be fired, according to Emory's HR website.

The mandate arrives as flu cases across nearly all 50 states, including Georgia, remain at "minimal" levels as of late September, according to CDC surveillance data. The CDC says flu

activity typically peaks between December and February.

Janet Christenbury, the health system's vice president of media relations, said the requirement aims to protect patients and staff and encourage early vaccination.

Emory Healthcare does not mandate COVID-19 vaccines, although it encourages employees to decide with their providers.

Studies question how well flu shots work

Research raises concerns about whether flu shots provide the protection proponents claim. A Cleveland Clinic preprint study of more than 53,000 of its employees found that those vaccinated had a 27% higher risk of flu in the 2024-2025 season. The authors said they could not find a protective effect.

According to CDC estimates, flu vaccine effectiveness has swung from a low of 19% to a high of 60% since the 2009-10 season, depending on patient age and how closely the vaccine matches circulating strains.

Brian Hooker, Ph.D., chief scientific officer at Children's Health Defense, told The Defender, the group's news outlet, that "the flu shot has never really prevented transmission of the flu and in some years (i.e., last year) the efficacy of preventing the flu is actually negative." He said the flu would spread through a vaccinated population nearly as easily as an unvaccinated one.

A 2012 randomized trial of 115 children, published in *Clinical Infectious Diseases*, found that those who got the flu shot were more than four times as likely to have a lab-confirmed infection with another respiratory virus.

Healthcare workers are increasingly declining flu shots

The mandate comes as more healthcare professionals resist flu vaccination. Flu vaccine uptake among frontline healthcare workers in England stood at about 38% in late February 2025, according to the U.K. Health Security Agency. In the U.S., vaccination rates among nursing home workers dropped to approximately 42% for the 2024-2025 flu season, down from about 45% the year before, according to the CDC.

Dr. Sherika Newman of Doctor in the Family, an Atlanta-based patient advocacy service, said flu vaccine requirements are common in healthcare settings. "Asking health care providers or people who interact with patients to take the flu vaccine early every year is what we always mandate so that we are protecting ourselves from spreading viruses to vulnerable populations," Newman told *CBS News*.

Moderna's mRNA flu shot now available

This year marks the introduction of Moderna's mRNA flu vaccine, mFLUSIVA, which received FDA approval in August for people age 50 and older, with accelerated approval for those 65 and older pending a follow-up study. Most flu vaccines are still made from inactivated virus grown in eggs, or from recombinant protein technology.

Flu shot formulations change annually based on predictions about which strains will circulate, and the updated versions are not put through new clinical trials before reaching the public.

The Cleveland Clinic data came from a workforce operating under a similar mandate. Emory's employees now face the same choice: take a shot whose protection the CDC acknowledges can swing widely from year to year, or risk their jobs.

Sources for this article include:

ChildrensHealthDefense.org

CBSNews.com

EmoryHealthcare.org

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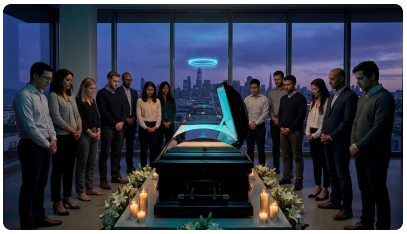

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